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Oaths, Imprecations and Other Blasphemous Formulas in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan's *The Rivals*

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Some people may resort to foul language like swearing and cursing to vent uncontrollably intense feelings. These profane and stigmatized expressions, which occur in a large variety of forms, have evolved for centuries and are now deep-rooted in English-speaking countries. It is true that most of them have lost their original or literal senses and are used merely as meaningless expletives, but there are some which are still deemed strictly as taboo--social restrictions prohibit their use in public. This article deals with oaths, imprecations and other blasphemous formulas found in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). Examples are sorted according to their fundamental meanings, with some statistical analyses added in a later section for further discussion. We are concerned here particularly with the linguistic features influenced by such social factors as "gender" and "class," tracing the trends in 18th century British society. We hope to elucidate what conventional formulas were widely adopted in those days and how new modes were devised by each author.

Keywords : oath, imprecation, swearing, expletive, 18th c. British drama

0. Introduction

Oaths and imprecations, as a whole, are often associated with taboo words, which values of a society make one refrain from uttering in public or in ceremonious situations. Regardless of their propriety, new phrases were ever brought into the world, while some old ones survived and were passed down through the ages. Eventually, innumerable oaths and imprecations (or more explicitly put, "swearing" and "cursing") have accumulated, until they have come up to forming one significant aspect in colloquial English. Why have people never ceased to use them, at least among certain peer groups, despite the fact that they are labelled low, stigmatized or even "socially offensive"? One conceivable answer would be that these expressions sound simply "powerful," all the more for their being "felt to be wrong," as Trudgill ([1974] 2000[4]: 19) suggests when discussing taboo and swear words.

To return to the point of values of a society, they differ in each period and the differences of values and social attitudes affect the decision whether a certain debased expression can be permitted in its full/partial use or not. Abusive language was comparatively widespread in the Elizabethan Age (its use was much more restricted, though, than today), when Shakespeare may have felt less restrained to expose it in his works, whereas its use was strictly prohibited in the Victorian Age, when ethical and moral sense permeated especially among people of gentility and education. Our concern in the present article is to investigate what modes of oath and imprecation--in single words, formulas, frames and so forth--prevailed in the 18th century, the period

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between the two prominent Ages, and to explore how the social attitudes were in those days towards the abusive language.

To focus on discussing these issues, Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (henceforth *SSC*) and Sheridan's *The Rivals* (henceforth *Riv*) are selected here; for male/female characters in both dramas--ranged from the upper to the lower classes--may probably show richer varieties than those in many other contemporary works, and most of them are assigned to more or less substantial roles, interacting well with each other in the plays. In the course of developing our discussion, we hope to point out gender and class differences in the language, if there are any, by closely analysing the data collected.

1. In Association with the Infernal Regions

1. 1 'Deuce'

"Deuce" is generally known to be synonymous with "devil," signifying "the personification or spirit of mischief."[1] When used as an expletive in a question, it conveys strong feelings like "impatience, anger or astonishment," emphasizing the content of the question. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth *OED*) notes that this word is derived probably from LG[2] in the 17th century, its first definition being "bad luck, plague, mischief"[3] in imprecations and exclamations. In association with this sense, it has been considered, as suggested in the *OED*, to be originally the same with the "deuce" at dice (i.e. a gambler's exclamation of vexation 'the deuce!'); for "'two' is the lowest and most unlucky throw." Sheridan's *Riv* provides a few examples, in all of which "deuce" occurs as an expletive after a wh-interrogative[4]:

(1) --but who the deuce thought of seeing you in Bath! (*Riv* 77, Fag[5])[6] / --but what the deuce is the meaning of it?--I am quite astonish'd! (*Riv* 127, Sir Anthony) / Hey! what the deuce have you got here? (*Riv* 138, Sir Anthony)

1. 2 'Devil'

Applied to a great deal of undesirable qualities, "devil" has long been employed in various phrases, exclamations and proverbs. When used as an expletive or in an interjectional phrase, it expresses "impatience, irritation, strong surprise, dismay, or vexation,"[7] similar to the above-mentioned "deuce." Its examples abound in both dramas, particularly in *Riv* (3 times in *SSC* and 19 times in *Riv*):

As expletives:

(2a) Where the devil is mine? (*SSC* 128, Servant) / what the devil do you do with a *wig*, Thomas? (*Riv* 79, Fag) / Why, what the d--l's the matter with the fool? (*Riv* 97, Sir Anthony) / What the devil good can *Passion* do! (*Riv* 98, Sir Anthony) / What the d--l signifies *right*, when your *honour* is concerned? (*Riv* 116, Sir Lucius) / What the d--l shall I do! (*Riv* 122, Capt. Absolute) / Who the devil is he talking to? (*Riv* 128, Sir Lucius), *et passim*.

Interjectionally:

(2b) The devil, Sir, do you think we have brought down a whole Joiners Company, or the Corporation of Bedford, to eat up such a supper? (*SSC* 137, Marlow) / O! the devil! how shall I support it? (*SSC* 143, Marlow) / Oh, the devil! (*SSC* 213, Marlow) / The devil they are! (*Riv* 77, Thomas) / Oh, the devil! my last note. (*Riv* 110, Absolute) / O, the devil! here's Sir Anthony!--how shall I escape him? (*Riv* 137, Absolute), etc.

1. 3 'Hell'

"Hell" is one of the most common and widespread expletives. Interestingly enough, the *OED* offers no examples from any 18th century literary works, although the first citation is taken from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1596) in the Early Modern English (henceforth EModE) and examples abound considerably in the 19th century and most in the 20th century.[8] This explains well why there is only one example in *Riv* and none in *SSC*. The only example is found in a speech of Faulkland, a male character of the upper class. In combination with "the devil," his irritation and vexation are further intensified in (3):

(3) Hell and the devil!--There! there!--I told you so! I told you so! (*Riv* 94, Faulkland)

2. Minced Forms of "God"

2. 1 'Gad' and its Derivatives

"Gad," which is a minced pronunciation of "God," started to be used in the EModE period as a mild or

softened oath.[9] It occurs in a simple word as well as in such phrases as "by Gad" and "Gad's life." There happens to be no example of "by Gad" in either drama and only one example of "Gad's life" in *Riv* (shown in (4b)). Instead, "egad," along with its aphetic form (i.e. "'gad"), occur fairly frequently in both dramas (shown in (4c)). "Egad" is considered, in the *OED*, to have represented "A God!" earlier, but in later times it may have been associated with asseverations like "i'faith" or possibly with "by God."[10]

(4a) Gad! Sir, how came you to call my son out, without explaining your reasons? (*Riv* 143, Sir Anthony) / Gad! sir, I like your spirit; (*Riv* 145, Sir Anthony)

(4b) Hey!--Gad's life; it is.--Why, Jack,--what are you afraid of? (*Riv* 137, Sir Anthony)

(4c) Egad! and that's more than I do myself. (*SSC* 147, Marlow) / Egad! she has hit it, sure enough. (*SSC* 172, Marlow) / Egad! I don't quite like this chit. (*SSC* 173, Marlow) / 'Gad, that's true--I grow full of anger, Sir Lucius!--I fire apace! (*Riv* 116, Acres) / 'Egad, but I will, Jack. (*Riv* 120, Acres) / Permit me, Ma'am--Tol-de-rol--'gad, I should like to have a little fooling myself--Tol-de-rol! de-rol. (*Riv* 125, Sir Anthony) / So!--egad! I thought as much!--that d--n'd monosyllable has froze me! (*Riv* 125, Capt. Absolute) / 'Gad, I must try what a little *spirit* will do. (*Riv* 125, Capt. Absolute) / 'Gad! Sir, I like your spirit; and at night we single lads will drink a health to the young couples, and a husband to Mrs. Malaprop. (*Riv* 145, Sir Anthony), etc.

"Ecod," which is a variation of "egad," also occurs frequently as a mild oath. The date of the first citation in the *OED* is 1733 (from Fielding's work).[11] It is very likely, therefore, that "ecod" appeared in the first half of the 18th century and may have been used widely by contemporary people. Actually, it is used vigorously by Tony and Diggory in *SSC* (17 times and 4 times, repectively):

(5) Ecod, and so it would, Master Slang. (*SSC* 118, Tony) / Ecod, and when I'm of age, I'll be no bastard, I promise you. (*SSC* 118, Tony) / Ecod, I thank your worship, I'll make a shift to stay my stomach with a slice of cold beef in the pantry. (*SSC* 126, Diggory) / Ecod, your worship, I never have courage till I see the eatables and drinkables brought upo' the table, and then I'm as bauld as a lion. (*SSC* 127, Diggory) / Ecod! I'll not be made a fool of no longer. (*SSC* 153, Tony) / Ecod! Mamma, your own notes are the wildest of the two. (*SSC* 154, Tony) / Ecod! I have got them. (*SSC* 161, Tony), *et passim.*

2. 2 'Od' / 'Odd'

Besides "gad," "od" (or "odd") is another minced form of "God." In the case of "gad," the vowel /ɒ/ is changed into /æ/, whereas the initial consonant /g/ is elided in "od." According to the *OED*, "od" came into "vogue about 1600, when, to avoid the overt profanation of sacred names, many minced and disguised equivalents became prevalent."[12] In addition, a similar expression "odso" is used "as exclamation of surprise."[13] It is corrupted from "God-so," after oaths beginning with "God's."[14] A number of examples are found in the words of Thomas, a coachman to Sir Anthony Absolute in *Riv*:

(6a) Odd! Sir Anthony will stare to see the Captain here! (*Riv* 77, Thomas) / Odd! I warrant she has a set of thousands at least: (*Riv* 78, Thomas) / Odd! he's giving her money! (*Riv* 79, Thomas) / Odd! I'll make myself small enough: (*Riv* 140, Acres)

(6b) Odso! Then you must show me your embroidery. (*SSC* 174, Marlow) / Od'so! she and your father can be but just arrived before me? (*Riv* 91, Acres) / Odd so!--I mustn't forget *her* tho'. (*Riv* 97, Sir Anthony) / To please my father! Z--ds! not to please--O, my father!--Odd so! (*Riv* 104, Sir Anthony)

Furthermore, a set phrase like "odd's life" (> "God's life") is used frequently in *Riv*. This formula, along with "od's me" and "od's my will," also started to appear around 1600[15]:

(7) Hey!--Odd's life! Mr. Fag!--give us your hand, my old fellow-servant. (*Riv* 77, Thomas) / Odd's life! when I heard how the lawyers and doctors

had took to their own hair, I thought how 'twould go next: (*Riv* 79, Thomas) / Odds life, Sir! if you have the estate, you must take it with the live stock on it, as it stands. (*Riv* 97, Sir Anthony) / Odds life! when I ran away with your mother, I would not have touched anything old or ugly to gain an empire. (*Riv* 104, Sir Anthony) / Odds life! I've a great mind to marry the girl myself! (*Riv* 105, Sir Anthony) / By my valour, I should like to see you fight first! Odds life! (*Riv* 117) / Odds life! people often fight without any mischief done! (*Riv* 119, Acres) / Odds life! I'm in such spirits,--I don't know what I could not do! (*Riv* 125, Sir Anthony) / Odds life! Sir Lucius, I'm not going to fight Mr. Faulkland; these are my particular friends. (*Riv* 142, Acres)

2. 3 'Zooks'

"Zooks" is short for "gadzooks," expressing "vexation, surprise, or other emotion."[16] "Gadzooks" is probably a corruption of "God's Hooks (the nails of the cross),"[17] whose other derivatives may have been "cotzooks," "cutzooks" and "adzooks." There is only one example of this oath found in Thomas' speech:

(8) Zooks! 'tis the Captain.--Is that the Lady with him? (*Riv* 79, Thomas)

2. 4 "Sdeath'

"'Sdeath" is a euphemistic abbreviation of "God's death." According to the *OED*, it first appeared in the EModE period.[18] In Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (henceforth *DSUE*), it is suggested that this oath "should perhaps be considered S.E. (i.e. Standard English)."[19] Its users are all male characters of the upper class, as seen in (9), which may endorse the suggestion made by *DSUE*:

(9) 'Sdeath!--you rascal! you have not trusted him! (*Riv* 88, Capt. Absolute) / 'Sdeath! to make herself the pipe and ballad-monger of a circle! to soothe her light heart with catches and glees! (*Riv* 93, Faulkland) / 'Sdeath! what a brute am I to use her thus! (*Riv* 108, Faulkland) / 'Sdeath, I never was in a worse humour in my life! (*Riv* 128, Capt. Absolute)

2. 5 'Wounds'

2. 5. 1 'Zounds'

"Zounds," which is a euphemistic abbreviation of "God's wounds," also started to be used in oaths and asseverations in the EModE period.[20] The *OED*'s abundant citations from the 16th century resources may serve to support the observation that this oath must have been very prevalent in those days. Actually, this oath diffuses most widely (as many as 33 times) all over the two dramas. It occurs exclusively in the speech of male characters, particularly of the upper class. Some examples are given below:

(10) Zounds, man! we could as soon find out the longitude! (*SSC* 122, Marlow) / Zounds! George, sure you won't go? how can you leave us? (*SSC* 145, Marlow) / Zounds! here they are. Morrice! Prance! (*SSC* 162, Tony) / Zounds! He'll drive me distracted, if I contain myself any longer. (*SSC* 181, Mr. Hardcastle) / Z--ds! Thomas, she could pay the national debt as easy as I could my washerwoman! (*Riv* 78, Fag) / Z--ds! had she made one in a Cotillon--I believe I could have forgiven even that--but to be monkey-led for a night! (*Riv* 94, Faulklnad) / Z--ds! sirrah! The lady shall be as ugly as I choose: (*Riv* 98, Sir Anthony) / If not, z--ds! don't enter the same hemisphere with me! (*Riv* 99, Sir Anthony) / No--Z--ds! she's not coming!--nor don't intend it, I suppose. (*Riv* 108, Faulkland) / Z--ds! as the man in the plays says, 'I could do such deeds!' (*Riv* 116, Acres) / Z--ds! I'm not asking him to dinner. (*Riv* 117, Acres) / Z--ds, David, you're a coward! (*Riv* 119, Acres) / Z--ds! sirrah! why don't you speak? (*Riv* 122, Sir Anthony) / Z--ds! I shall be in a phrenzy! (*Riv* 127, Sir Anthony) / O! z--ds! no, Sir, not for the world! (*Riv* 138, Capt. Absolute) / Zounds! Jack, how durst you insult the gentleman in a manner which his honour could not brook? (*Riv* 143, Sir Anthony), *et passim.*

2. 5. 2 'Wauns'

"Wauns" was a variant of "wounds," a corruption of "God's wounds," from the 17th to the 18th century.[21] The pronunciation of "wounds" is not /wu:ndz/ but /waʊndz/ as its variant form "wauns" suggests. This oath is used by *SSC*'s Diggory, a male servant to Mr. Hardcastle:

(11) Wauns, and I'm sure it canna be mine. (*SSC* 127, Diggory)

2. 5. 3 'Oons'

"Oons" (/u:nz/) is a worn-down form of "wounds" (i.e. "God's wounds!" "Zounds!"), "/w/ being dropped before /u:/, and /d/ after /n/, as is common in dialects."[22] It is "a petty oath" used exclusively by David, a servant to Bob Acres:

(12) Oons! I'll hold a gallon, there an't a dog in the house but would bark, and I question whether *Phillis* would wag a hair of her tail! (*Riv* 114, David) / Oons! what will the old lady say, when she hears o't? (*Riv* 118, David) / Oons! here to meet some lion-hearted fellow, I warrant, with his d--n'd double-barrell'd swords, and cut-and-thrust pistols! (*Riv* 119, David) / Oons! I wouldn't swear it mayn't go off! (*Riv* 119, David) / Oons! he's out of sight! and I'm out of breath, for my part! (*Riv* 139, David)

3. "Lord" and its Minced Forms

3. 1 'Lord'

"Lord" is another common term used in asseverations, though it offers much less variety than "God" in either drama. When used as an interjection, it expresses "a mere exclamation of surprise," which originates from "the use in invocations."[23]

(13) Lord, Mr. Hardcastle, you're for ever at your Dorothy's and your old wife's. (*SSC* 107, Mrs. Hardcastle) / O Lord! she won't mind *me*--only tell her Beverley-- (*Riv* 111, Capt. Absolute)

3. 2 'Lud'

"Lud" is a minced form of "lord," used "as an exclamation."[24] It may have been quite prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries; for the date of the first citation in the *OED* is 1725 and a considerable number of examples are drawn from these two centuries. The second extract in (14) is included among the examples in the *OED*. This minced oath is used exclusively by female characters:

(14) Lud, this news of Papa's, puts me all in a flutter. (*SSC* 113, Miss Hardcastle) / O lud! he has almost cracked my head. (*SSC* 153, Miss Neville) / O lud! O lud! the most notorious spot in all the country. (*SSC* 204, Mrs. Hardcastle) / O lud! he'll murder my poor boy, my darling! (*SSC* 207, Mrs. Hardcastle) / Lud! Ma'am, here is Miss Melville. (*Riv* 81, Lucy) / O Lud! ma'am, they are both coming upstairs. (*Riv* 83, Lucy) / O lud!--now, Mr. Fag--you flurry one so. (*Riv* 102, Lucy) / O Lud! Sir Anthony! (*Riv* 124, Mrs. Malaprop) / Lud! Child, what's the matter with you? (*Riv* 134, Lydia) / O Lud! What has brought my Aunt here! (*Riv* 135, Lydia), etc.

3. 3 'Lard'

"Lard," which is an obsolete form of "lord," was current from the 16th to 18th century.[25] Its spelling suggests that the vowel /ɔ:/ is changed into an open vowel /ɑ:/. *Riv* has one example of "lard," in which it is used in the optative:

(15) Master Butler wouldn't believe his own eyes, and Mrs. Pickle would cry, Lard presarve me! our dairymaid would come giggling to the door, and I warrant Dolly Tester, your honour's favourite, would blush like my waistcoat. (*Riv* 114, Mrs. Pickle in David's speech)

The verb "presarve" (> "preserve") in the optative also suggests that the vowel in the accented syllable is changed into the open vowel /ɑ:/. This open vowel for a mid-central long vowel /ɜ:/ occurs particularly in vulgar people's speeches. *SSC*'s Diggory, for instance, uses "parfectly" for "perfectly" and "sartain" for "certain."

3. 4 'La'

"La" is used as "a mere expression of surprise."[26] According to the *OED*, this "la" may have been in origin an alteration prompted by an instinctive sense of expressiveness in the vowel sound of "lo" and in later use it has coalesced with "lor" (= "Lord!") as an exclamation.[27] Miss Hardcastle in *SSC* uses it once when she shows Marlow an affected surprise:

(16) O la, sir, you'll make one asham'd. (*SSC* 170, Miss Hardcastle)

3. 5 'Law' / 'Laws'

While the *OED* does not give any clear and specif-

ic statement on the origin of "law" (though it encourages us to confer the word with "la" and "lo"[28]), *DSUE* regards it as "Lord," adding "Prob. arising from cumulative force of la!, lo!, and Lor'."[29] Like the case of "la" mentioned above, "law" is used by Miss Hardcastle again in a similar situation:

(17) Inn! O law–what brought that in your head? One of the best families in the country keep an inn–Ha! ha! ha! (*SSC* 184, Miss Hardcastle)

"Laws" was a variant form of "law" in the 19th century.[30] There are four examples found in *SSC*, in all of which it is used in the phrase "by the laws":

(18) By the laws, your worship, that's parfectly unpossible. (*SSC* 23, Diggory) / By the laws, I never saw it better acted in my life. (*SSC* 166, Tony) / By the laws, mamma, you make me for to laugh, ha! ha! (*SSC* 166, Tony) / By the laws, Miss, it was your own cleverness, and not my stupidity, that did your business. (*SSC* 192, Tony)

4. 'Heaven'

"Heaven" is the abode of God, in association with which it means "God" itself metonymically; for it is God who realizes the power of heaven. Like "God," it has diverse usages; e.g. "Heaven knows . . . " for emphasis, "Heaven send . . . " for the optative, "Gracious Heaven!" for exclamation, and so forth. There are a few examples of its interjectional usage, as seen in (19a), in which it expresses a total surprise or anger. "Heaven" also occurs in asseverations with such prepositions as "by," "through," and "before (or aphetically elided into "'fore"). Whereas the origins of most oaths can be traced down from the EModE period, the asseverative phrases of "heaven" can be traced as far back as 1000[31] in the Late Old English period. There are seven occurrences of "by Heaven(s)" (shown in (19b)), all of which are used by male characters of the upper class:

(19a) O Heav'ns! Beverley! (*Riv* 112, Lydia) / Good Heavens! what assurance!–Lydia, Lydia, you ought to know that lying don't become a young woman! (*Riv* 113, Mrs Malaprop) / [Aside] Heav'ns! 'tis Beverley's voice! (*Riv* 123, Lydia) / Heav'ns! what do you mean? (*Riv* 131, Julia), etc.

(19b) By Heaven! she weeps. (*SSC* 185, Marlow) / By heavens, Madam, fortune was ever my smallest consideration. (*SSC* 210, Marlow) / Had I a thousand daughters, by Heaven! I'd as soon have them taught the black-art as their alphabet! (*Riv* 85, Sir Anthony) / By heavens! I shall forswear your company. (*Riv* 90, Capt. Absolute) / By Heavens! I would fling all goods of fortune from me with a prodigal hand, to enjoy the scene where I might clasp my Lydia to my bosom, and say, the world affords no smile to me but here– (*Riv* 112, Capt. Absolute) / By Heav'ns! Faulkland, you don't deserve her! (*Riv* 130, Capt. Absolute) / By Heav'ns! Julia– (*Riv* 133, Faulkland)

5 Other Formulas of Oaths

5. 1 'By Jingo'

The origin of "jingo" is obscure and uncertain. The *OED* notes that it appeared around 1670 "as a piece of conjuror's gibberish," probably "a mere piece of sonorous nonsense," adding "a recent conjecture, since *jingo* began to attract attention, would identify it with the Basque word for 'God', given by Van Eys and Larramendi as *Jinko*, *Jainko* (*Yinko*, *Yainko*), *Jincoa*, *Jaincoa*; the suggestion being that this may have been caught up from Basque sailors."[32] This observation is, however, as yet unsupported by evidence. According to the *OED*, the phrase "by jingo" first appeared in 1694 and seems to have been in use since then as "a vigorous form of asseveration."[33] One example is seen in Tony's words:

(20) By jingo, there's not a pond or a slough within five miles of the place but they can tell the taste of. (*SSC* 203, Tony)

5. 2 'By the Elevens'

The origin of this rare oath still remains obscure and uncertain.[34] *DSUE* considers this phrase as "a jocular expletive," assuming it to be "coined by Goldsmith," probably "punning heavens!"[35] The following example in Diggory's speech is the only citation in the *OED*:

(21) By the elevens, my pleace is gone quite out of my head. (*SSC* 127, Diggory)

5. 3 'By the Mass'

"Mass," which is a religious service chiefly in the Roman Catholic church, has long been used in oaths and asseverations since the Middle English (henceforth ME) period. The first citation in the *OED* is taken from Chaucer's work.[36] This oath is used exclusively by David similar to the case of "oons," which it often co-occurs with:

(22) You are quite another creature, believe me, master, by the Mass! (*Riv* 114, David) / By the Mass, I can't help looking at your head! (*Riv* 114, David) / Then, by the Mass, sir! I would do no such thing–ne'er a St. Lucius O'Trigger in the kingdom should make me fight, when I wasn't so minded. Oons! (*Riv* 118, David) / Aye, by the Mass! and I would be very careful of it; (*Riv* 118, David) / But put the case that he kills me!–by the Mass! I go to the worms, and my honour whips over to my enemy! (*Riv* 118, David) / By the Mass, I think 'tis ten to one against you!–Oons! (*Riv* 119, David) / *By the Mass*! it don't look like another letter! It is, as I may say, a designing and malicious-looking letter!–and I warrant smells of gunpowder like a soldier's pouch!–Oons! I wouldn't swear it mayn't go off! (*Riv* 119, David) / Look'ee, my Lady–by the Mass! there's mischief going on. (*Riv* 136, David)

5. 4 'Gemini'

The fundamental meaning of "Gemini" is a constellation in astronomy (and one of the zodiac signs as well). It has been used, since the mid 17th century, as "a mild form of oath or exclamation" to express surprise.[37] While the *OED* labels it simply as "vulgar," *DSUE* considers it "not so low" originally. *DSUE* also lists "gem(m)iny," "jim(m)iny" and (in the earliest example) "gemony" as its variants. The only user of this oath is Lucy, a maid servant to Lydia Languish:

(23) O, Gemini! I'd sooner cut my tongue out. (*Riv* 87, Lucy) / [Speaking simply.] O gemini! and I have been waiting for your worship here on the North. (*Riv* 100, Lucy).

5. 5 'On/Upon One's Word'

This asseverative phrase, which corresponds to such intensives as "assuredly," "certainly," "truly," and "indeed,"[40] is used by both male and female characters of the upper class, as seen in (24):

(24) Upon my word, a very well-looking house; antique, but creditable. (*SSC* 128, Hastings) / Extremely elegant and degagée, upon my word, Madam. (*SSC* 150, Hastings) / No, upon my word.–(Riv 81, Lydia) / Not yet, upon my word–nor has he the least idea of my being in Bath. (*Riv* 82, Julia) / O, upon my word, I acquit you. (*Riv* 92, Capt. Absolute) / Nay, Sir, upon my word-- (*Riv* 98, Capt. Absolute) / Very pretty, upon my word. (*Riv* 101, Sir Lucius) / Upon my word, young woman, you have hit it: (*Riv* 101, Sir Lucius) / Upon my word, Jack, thou'rt either a very great hypocrite, or– (*Riv* 105, Sir Anthony) / Very dutiful, upon my word! (*Riv* 113, Mrs. Malaprop) / Nay, sir, upon my word– (*Riv* 127, Capt. Absolute) / Upon my word, then, you must be a very subtle disputant: (*Riv* 128, Capt. Absolute) / Not I, upon my word, Sir. (*Riv* 142, Faulkland), etc.

5. 6 In Combination with 'Soul'

"Soul" has been used "in various asseverative phrases or as an exclamation"[39] since the ME period. There are mainly three kinds of phrases in *SSC* and *Riv* (shown from (25a) to (25c)):

(25a) I can't help laughing at that–he! he! he!–for the soul of me. (*SSC* 126, Diggory)

(25b) O, by my soul! there is an innate levity in woman, that nothing can overcome. (*Riv* 92, Faulkland) / O, by my soul! it is the most unpardonable breach of friendship! (*Riv* 116, Sir Lucius) / No, by my soul, they drew their broad-swords, and left the lazy sons of peace to settle the justice of it. (*Riv* 116, Sir Lucius)

(25c) Not I, upon my soul! (*Riv* 115, Acres) / No, upon my soul, I do not. (*Riv* 121, Absolute) / Upon my soul, Jack, thou art a very impudent fellow! (*Riv* 124, Sir Anthony) / Upon my soul, Ma'am--(*Riv* 127, Capt. Absolute) / upon my soul!–a little gypsey! (*Riv* 128, Capt. Absolute) / upon my soul, I should not have discovered it at this interview (*Riv* 128, Capt. Absolute) / 'Tis fact, upon my soul! (*Riv* 130, Capt. Absolute)

5. 7 In Combination with 'Conscience'

Two asseverative phrases using "conscience" are found in *SSC* and *Riv*; i.e. "of all conscience" and "on/upon one's conscience" (frequently the final /n/ of "on" is elided). The first citation of the former in the *OED* is in 1568 and that of the latter is around 1290, nearly three hundred years earlier.[38] "Of all conscience" occurs only in *SSC* (its examples are in (26a)), whereas "on/upon one's conscience" occurs mainly in *Riv* (see the examples in (26b)). The frequent user of the latter formula is Sir Lucius O'Trigger, an Irish Gentleman. There is no evidence that this oath may be peculiar to Irish people, but many examples happen to be found in Irish characters' speech in 18th century British literary works.

(26a) Ay, among them you are impudent enough of all conscience. (*SSC* 129, Hastings) / I have been mortified enough of all conscience, and here comes something to complete my embarrassment. (*SSC* 142, Marlow)

(26b) Good liquor will sit upon a good supper, but a good supper will not sit upon--hiccup--upon my conscience, Sir. (*SSC* 181, Jeremy) / Aye, and the properest way o' my conscience! (*Riv* 86, Mrs. Malaprop) / Hah! my little embassadress--upon my conscience, I have been looking for you; (*Riv* 100, Sir Lucius) / Upon my conscience! Lucy, your lady is a great mistress of language. (*Riv* 101, Sir Lucius) / Tender! aye, and profane too, o' my conscience! (*Riv* 110, Mrs. Malaprop) / Very ill, upon my conscience-- (*Riv* 115, Sir Lucius) / O' my conscience, I believe so! (*Riv* 123 Mrs. Malaprop) / Upon my conscience!--these officers are always in one's way in love-affairs: (*Riv* 128, Sir Lucius) / upon my conscience, Mr. Acres, you must leave those things to me. (*Riv* 139, Sir Lucius) / Upon my conscience, Mr. Acres, your valour has *oozed* away with a vengeance! (*Riv* 142, Sir Lucius)

6. Referential Oaths

6. 1 Acres's Use of Oaths

Acres' use of oaths is characterized particularly by fancy oaths, in which an asseverative phrase is composed impromptu according to each context or emotional state of mind. Take the following oath for instance:

(27) Absolutely I propose so--then if I can find out this Ensign Beverley, odds triggers and flints! I'll make him know the difference o't. (*Riv* 95, Acres)

Sheridan suggests, effectively through the dialogue between Capt. Absolute and Acres, that this type of oath is new and innovative, being called "oath referential" or "sentimental swearing":

ABSOLUTE: Spoke like a man--But pray, Bob, I observe you have got an odd kind of a new method of swearing--
ACRES: Ha! ha! you've taken notice of it--'tis genteel, isn't it?--I didn't invent it myself though; but a commander in our militia--a great scholar, I assure you--says that there is no meaning in the common oaths, and that nothing but their antiquity makes them respectable;--because, he says, the ancients would never stick to an oath or two, but would say By Jove! or by Bacchus! or by Mars! or by Venus! or by Pallas! according to the sentiment--so that to swear with propriety, says my little major, the 'oath should be an echo to the sense'; and this we call the *oath referential*, or *sentimental swearing* - ha! ha! ha! 'tis genteel, isn't it?
(*Riv* 95-96)

Other examples of Acre's referential oaths include:

(28) Odds whips and wheels (*Riv* 91) / Odds Blushes and Blooms! (*Riv* 91) / Odds Crickets! (*Riv* 92) / Odds Minnums and Crotchets! (*Riv* 92) / Odds swimmings! (*Riv* 94) / odds frogs and tambours! (*Riv* 95) / Odd's jigs and tabors! (*Riv* 114) / Odds slanders and lies! (*Riv* 115) / Odds hilts and blades! (*Riv* 116) / Odds flints, pans, and triggers! (*Riv* 116) / Odds balls and barrels! (*Riv* 116) / Odds blades! (*Riv* 118) / odds crowns and laurels! (*Riv* 118) / Odds levels and aims! (*Riv* 139) / Odds bullets (*Riv* 140) / Odds tremors! (*Riv* 140) / Odds files! (*Riv* 140) / Odds Backs and Abettors! (*Riv* 142) / Odds Daggers and Balls! (*Riv* 143) / Odds Wrinkles! (*Riv* 145) / Odds Tabors and Pipes! (*Riv* 145), etc.

Another asseverative phrase peculiar to Acres is "by my valour." "Valour" occurs 18 times in *Riv* (never in *SSC*), out of which Acres uses it as many

as 16 times, with the remaining two also referring to his use of this word, though spoken by Sir Lucius. This phrase often co-occurs with another oath, usually beginning with "odds," as in:

(29) By my valour, I should like to see you fight first! Odds life! (*Riv* 117) / By my valour! then, Sir Lucius, forty yards is a good distance. (*Riv* 139) / Odds bullets, no!--by my valour! there is no merit in killing him so near; (*Riv* 140) / --so, by my valour! I will stand edge-ways. (*Riv* 141) / No--I say--we won't run, by my valour! (*Riv* 141) / Mind, gentlemen, he calls me a Coward; Coward was the word, by my valour! (*Riv* 142) / --and if I can't get a wife without fighting for her, by my Valour! I'll live a bachelor. (*Riv* 144)

6. 2 On the Analogy of 'By All That's Good'

Some new phrases are made on the analogy of "by all that's good," though this formula itself also occurs a few times both in *SSC* and in *Riv*: e.g. "By all that's good, I can have no happiness but what's in your power to grant me. (*SSC* 211, Marlow)"; "By all that's good, Sir-- (*Riv* 127, Capt. Absolute)." The coined phrases may serve to convey each situation or emotional state of mind:

(30) Ha! what do I see? Miss Neville, by all that's happy! (*SSC* 140, Hastings) / I tell you, Tony, by all that's precious, the jewels are gone, and I shall be ruin'd for ever. (*SSC* 166, Mrs. Hardcastle) / By all that's impudent, it makes me laugh. (*SSC* 182, Mr. Hardcastle) / By all that's just and true, I never gave miss Hardcastle the slightest mark of my attachment, or even the most distant hint to suspect me of affection. (*SSC* 199, Marlow) / Father-in-law, by all that's unlucky, come to take one of his night walks. (*SSC* 205, Tony)

Mr. Hardcastle is particularly characterized by the following asseveration:

(31) By the hand of my body, I believe his impudence is infectious! (*SSC* 174, Mr. Hardcastle) / By the hand of my body, but you shall not. (*SSC* 213, Mr. Hardcastle) / Then, by the hand of my body, I'm proud of the connexion. (*SSC* 213, Mr. Hardcastle)

7. Miscellaneous

7. 1 'Burn it'

The use of "burn" in imprecations may probably have started around the beginning of the 18th century, as the first citation in the *OED* is taken from Swift's *Letters*.[41] This formula appears only once in *Riv*:

(32) O burn it, Ma'am, the hair-dresser has torn away as far as *Proper Pride*. (*Riv* 84, Lucy)

7. 2 'Odd rabbit it'

Another formula used once in *Riv* is "odd rabbit it," in which "rabbit" functions as a verb in the imprecation. The *OED* considers this meaningless verb to be "a fanciful alteration of *rat*" in "od rat" which corresponds to "drat."[42] "Rabbit" is treated in *DSUE* as an equivalent of "confound."[43] Both the *OED* and *DSUE* refer to the citation from Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742): "'Rabbit the fellow,' cries he." In addition, the first citation in the *OED* of "od rabbit it" is also taken from his *Tom Jones* (1749). Though it is not certain whether this formula was originally coined by Fielding or not, we can at least affirm that it must have appeared around the mid 18th century. It is still common dialectally from Cumbria to Wight, Kent and Devon in England.[44]

(33) Odd rabbit it! when the fashion had got foot on the Bar, I guess'd 'twould mount to the Box! (*Riv* 79, Thomas)

7. 3 'Damme'

"Damme" is a shortened form of "damn me!" used as "a profane imprecation."[45] According to the *OED*, this shortened form started to appear around the mid 17th century. There are a few examples found in *SSC*. Sheridan extends this imprecation to use as a noun in his *Riv* (meaning "the oath itself or its utterance"[46]), as seen in (34b). This interesting example is adopted as the first citation in the *OED*:

(34a) I'll drink for no man before supper, Sir, dammy! (*SSC* 181, Jeremy) / Baw! damme, but I'll fight you both, one after the other--with baskets. (*SSC* 193, Tony)

(34b) Come--now, shall I begin with an oath? Do, Sir

Lucius, let me begin with a damme. (*Riv* 117, Acres)

7. 4 'My Stars'

This phrase first appeared around 1700 and has been used in ejaculations, since then, "as a mild exclamation of surprise," similar to "my God!" and "my gracious!"[47] Its elliptical form "my!" (or "oh, my!") is still common especially in the US. This exclamatory phrase, along with "gemini" and "burn it," are used exclusively by Lucy:

(35) My stars! Now I'd wager a six-pence I went by while you were asleep. (*Riv* 101, Lucy) / O true, sir --but then she reads so--my stars! how she will read off-hand! (*Riv* 101, Lucy)

7. 5 'My Genus'

"Genus" (> genius) originates from the Latinate word "genius." In Latin the word mainly means "the tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character, and finally to conduct him out of the world,"[48] whereas in English it extends to mean "a demon or spiritual being in general."[49] The first citation in the *OED* of this sense is in the EModE period. It appears now chiefly in plural, "as a rendering of Arab. jinn, the collective name of a class of spirits (some good, some evil) supposed to interfere powerfully in human affairs," as the *OED* notes. Tony uses this unique term once, with its diphthong /ɪə/ reduced into a simple schwa:

(36) O! my genus, is that you. (*SSC* 161, Tony)

7. 6 'Damned'

"Damned" has been used as an intensifying adjective, meaning "profanely as a strong expression of reprehension or dislike,"[50] since Shakespearean times, and is now common and widespread all over English-speaking countries. Here is an interesting example from *Riv*, in which the hero is totally perplexed by his fiancée's addressing him as "sir" instead of a more friendly term:

LYDIA: Sir!
ABSOLUTE: [Aside.] So!--egad! I thought as much!–that d–n'd monosyllable has froze me! (*Riv* 125)

Some other examples include:

(37a) Pray Mr.--what's his d--d name? (*Riv* 93, Faulkland) / Oh! d--n'd, d--n'd levity! (*Riv* 94, Faulkland), etc.

Shown below are a few examples of "damned" used as intensifying adverbs:

(37b) I thought it was d–n'd sudden! (*Riv* 124, Sir Anthony) / I did not think her romance could have made her so d–nd absurd either. (*Riv* 128, Capt. Absolute) / What's this?--here's something d--d hard! (*Riv* 138, Sir Anthony), etc.
cf. So then, all's out, and I have been damnably imposed on. (*SSC* 184, Marlow)

It is very likely that "damned" started to be used as an intensifying adverb around the mid 18th century; for the date of the first citation in the *OED* is 1757.[51] This adverbial usage must have been quite prevalent in the latter half of the 18th century, judging from a large number of examples quoted from contemporary literary works.

7. 7 'deadly'

This is also an intensifying adjective, which means "excessive, 'terrible', 'awful'"[52] in a colloquial situation. The following example from *SSC* is cited in the *OED*:

(38) Lock-a-daisy, my masters, you're come a deadly deal wrong! (*SSC*, 121, Landlord)

7. 8 'devilish'

Similar to the case of "damned" mentioned above, "devilish" functions both as an intensifying adjective[53] (an example from *SSC* is shown in (39a)) and as an intensifying adverb (in (39b)). As seen from the examples in (39b), it can collocate with favorable adjectives, as well as with unfavorable ones, though it qualified "originally of things bad." In later use it became "a mere coarse intensive."[54]

(39a) I shall make devilish work to-night in the larder, I promise you. (*SSC*, 136 Marlow)

(39b) I'm dev'lish glad to see you, my lad: (*Riv* 77, Fag) / but I was sly, Sir–devilish sly! (*Riv* 88, Fag)

/ You know, sir, Lydia is romantic--dev'lish romantic, and very absurd of course: (*Riv* 138, Capt. Absolute)

8. Data Analyses

This section is wholly devoted to the analyses of the data collected above. The first task is to show the frequency of each formula, comparing the differences by gender and class.

[Table]

		MALE		FEMALE	
TERM	DATE	U	L	U	L
deuce	1694	2	1	0	0
devil (expletive)	c1385	10	3	0	0
devil (interj.)	c1460	9	0	0	0
hell*	1596	1	0	0	0
gad	1611	2	0	0	0
gad's life*	unsecified	1	0	0	0
egad/'gad	1673	11	0	0	0
ecod	1733	17	4	0	0
od/odd	1695	1	3	0	0
odso	1695	4	0	0	0
od's (odd's) life	unsecified	7	2	0	0
odds+α(exc. the above)*	unsecified	26	0	0	0
zooks*	1634	0	1	0	0
'sdeath	1606	4	0	0	0
zounds	1600	32	1	0	0
wauns*	1694	0	1	0	0
oons*	1593	0	5	0	0
lord*	1384	1	0	1	0
lud	1725	0	0	9	4
lard*	unsecified	0	1	0	0
la*	1598	0	0	1	0
law*	1588	0	0	1	0
by the laws	unsecified	3	1	0	0
by heaven(s)	c1000	7	0	0	0
by jingo*	1694	1	0	0	0
by the elevens*	1773	0	1	0	0
by the mass*	c1369	0	8	0	0
gemini*	1664	0	0	0	2
upon one's word	1588	10	0	4	0
by one's soul	1362	3	0	0	0
upon one's soul	unsecified	7	0	0	0
of all conscience	1568	2	0	0	0
upon one's conscience	c1290	6	1	3	0
by my valour*	unsecified	7	0	0	0
burn it*	1711	0	0	0	1
odd rabbit it*	1749	0	1	0	0
damme (interj.)	c1645	1	1	0	0
damme (noun)*	1775	1	0	0	0
my stars*	1707	0	0	0	2
my genius*	c1590	1	0	0	0
damned (adj./adv.)	1596/1757	13	2	0	0
deadly*	1660	0	1	0	0
devilish (adj./adv.)	1612/1612	2	2	0	0
Total occurrences	----	192	40	19	9

[N.B. DATE: the date of the first citation in the *OED*;
U: upper class / L: lower class; c: about; exc.: except
*: used only by one character]

From the statistical result shown above, we can temporarily point out the following:

① The dates of the first citations of most formulas are in the EModE period (particularly around 1600).

② Oaths and imprecations are used much more frequently by male characters.

③ Male characters of the upper class are the more predominant users.

④ There are male/female-exclusive formulas as well as male/female-preferential ones.

⑤ There are class-exclusive formulas as well as class-preferential ones.

Regarding ③, this observation can be controversial; it is true that the two dramas have various characters both of the upper and of the lower classes, but the male characters of the upper class outnumber the others. In addition, the most vigorous users of oaths are Tony in *SSC* and Sir Anthony Absolute and Bob Acres in *Riv*, all of whom are of the upper class. These two factors contribute markedly to the predominant occurrences. The result of the frequency itself may, therefore, be dubious and unreliable in this case. The more important thing to be pointed out here is that some characters have their own use of language (i.e. idiolects), characterized chiefly by the oaths and imprecations peculiar to them; e.g. Tony's use of unusual oaths in *SSC*, and Acres' use of fancy oaths and David's recurrent use of "oons" and "by the Mass" in *Riv*.

Final Remarks

Through our linguistic investigation into the two dramas, we have found that a wide variety of minced oaths, mostly related to religion, started to appear in the EModE period, when Shakespeare and his contemporary dramatists were active in Elizabethan London. Those euphemistic expressions became

prevalent through theaters to avoid profanity in public and many of them were still in common use in the 18th century. We have also found that while Goldsmith and Sheridan adopted numerous conventional formulas in their dramas, they were at the same time creative enough to invent new modes within the range where they would not neglect values and social attitudes in those days.

In passing, the social attitudes towards swearing and oaths in the 18th century are partly reflected in the following two extracts from Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*:

> . . . unless the Postillion, (a Lad who hath been since transported for robbing a Hen-roost) had voluntarily stript off a great Coat, his only Garment, at the same time swearing a great Oath, (for which he was rebuked by the Passengers) 'that he would rather ride in his Shirt all his Life, than suffer a Fellow-Creature to lie in so miserable a Condition.'
>
> (Bk I, Chap. XII, 47)[55]

> . . . ; but Mr. Adams was not greatly subject to Fear, he told him intrepidly that he very much approved his Virtue, but disliked his Swearing, and begged him not to addict himself to so bad a Custom, without which he said he might fight as bravely as Achilles did.
>
> (Bk II, Chap. VIII, 117-18)

Notes:

1. See "deuce" n^2. b. in the *OED*.
2. i.e. Low German.
3. See "deuce" n^2. a. in the *OED*.
4. The underlined parts are mine in each case.
5. The name in each parenthesis refers to the speaker of each extract.
6. All the subsequent quotations of *SSC* and *Riv* are from the editions indicated below in the **TEXTS** section.
7. *OED*, *s.v.* "devil," *n.* 20. a. & b.
8. *OED*, *s.v.* "hell," *n.* 9.
9. *OED*, *s.v.* "gad," $n.^5$ 1.
10. *OED*, *s.v.* "egad," *int.* 1.
11. *OED*, *s.v.* "ecod," *int.*
12. *OED*, *s.v.* "od^1."
13. *OED*, *s.v.* "odso," *int.*
14. *OED*, *s.v.* "God-so," *int.*
15. *OED*, *s.v.* "od^1," 2.b.
16. *OED*, *s.v.* "zooks," *int.*
17. *OED*, *s.v.* "cotzooks."
18. *OED*, *s.v.* "'sdeath," *int.*
19. *DSUE*, *s.v.* "'sdeath!, 'sdeynes!, 'sdiggers!"
20. *OED*, *s.v.* "zounds," *int.*
21. *OED*, *s.v.* "wounds," *int.*
22. *OED*, *s.v.* "oons," *int.*
23. *OED*, *s.v.* "lord," *n.* 9.
24. *OED*, *s.v.* "lud^2."
25. *OED*, *s.v.* "lord," *n.*
26. *OED*, *s.v.* "la," *int.*
27. *OED*, *s.v.* "law," *int.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *DSUE*, *s.v.* "Law!"
30. *OED*, *s.v.* "law," *int.*
31. *OED*, *s.v.* "heaven," *n.* 6.c.
32. *OED*, *s.v.* "jingo," *int.*, *n.*, *and a.*
33. *OED*, *s.v.* ibid., A. *int. and n.* 2.
34. *OED*, *s.v.* "eleven," *n.* 3.
35. *DSUE*, *s.v.* "elevens!, by the."
36. *OED*, *s.v.* "mass," *n.* 6.
37. *OED*, *s.v.* "gemini," *n.* 4.
38. *OED*, *s.v.* "conscience," *n.* IV. 10. & 9.
39. *OED*, *s.v.* "soul," *n.* 11. a. & b.
40. *OED*, *s.v.* "word," *n.* 15. a.
41. *OED*, *s.v.* "burn," v^1. 8.c.
42. *OED*, *s.v.* "rabbit, " $v.^2$
43. *DSUE*, *s.v.* "rabbit," v.
44. *OED*, *s.v.* "od^1," 1.b.
45. *OED*, *s.v.* "damme," 1. *int.*
46. *OED*, *s.v.* "damme," 2. *n.*
47. *OED*, *s.v.* "star," n. 3.
48. *OED*, *s.v.* "genius," 1.
49. *OED*, *s.v.* "genius," 2.
50. *OED*, *s.v.* "damned," *ppl.a.* 4.a.
51. *OED*, *s.v.* "damned," *ppl.a.* 4.b. as *adv.*
52. *OED*, *s.v.* "deadly," *a.* 8.a.
53. *OED*, *s.v.* "devilish," *a.* 4.
54. *OED*, *s.v.* "devilish," B. *adv.*
55. These two quotations from *Joseph Andrews* are from the edition indicated below in the **TEXTS** section.

E-TEXTS

ftp://sailor.gutenberg.org/pub/gutenberg/etext95/sstcq10.txt

http://www.geocities.com/muhammad_shafii/RIVALS.html

TEXTS

Goldsmith, Oliver. (1773) *She Stoops to Conquer* in *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith* Vol. V. (1966), edited by Arthur Friedman. Clarendon Press, Oxford. [abbreviated to *SSC*]

Sheridan, Richard Brinsley. (1775) *The Rivals* in *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (1973), edited by Cecil Price. Clarendon Press, Oxford. [abbreviated to *Riv*]

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